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Operational Vision:
The Way Means Reach The End

A Monograph
by
Major John E. Schlott
Armor



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School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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ABSTRACT

OPERATIONAL VISION: THE WAY MEANS REACH THE END by MAJ John E. Schlott, USA, 43 pages.

This monograph discusses the development and role of operational vision as it applies to conventional warfare. The study reviews classical and modern military thinkers to produce a theoretical base for operational vision. An examination of current and emerging doctrine identifies how the US Army develops and incorporates operational vision into campaign design. Two operational commanders are analyzed, based on theory and doctrine, to determine how they developed, stated and used operational vision. These commanders are General Hodges, Commander First US Army, and General Patton, Commander Third US Army. This analysis focuses on the time before, during and after the 1944-45 German Ardennes Campaign.

The monograph concludes that current doctrine should emphasize that the commander's estimate is independent of the staff, and should provide the driving force behind staff estimates. These staff estimates should answer the concerns and questions of the commander. To support this concept training at officer professional development schools should assign students to the role of commander. In this way a commander's estimate and staff estimate would be conducted in a parallel process in accordance with FM 101-5, Staff Operations and Organization.

Finally, like intent at the tactical level, operational vision should be included in the format for campaign plans as presented in Joint Chiefs of Staff Publication 3-0, Doctrine for Unified and Joint Operations. This statement of vision should include guidance on how and under what conditions battles and engagements will occur and the desired end state of the major operation or campaign. It should be an adjunct to the mission statement providing purpose to the mission essential task of the command.

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Major John E. Schlott

Title of Monograph: Operational Vision: The Way Means
Reach the End

Approved by:

Robert M. Epstein, Monograph Director
Robert M. Epstein, Ph.D.

James R. McDonough, Director, School
COL James R. McDonough, MS of Advanced Military
Studies

Philip J. Brookes, Director, Graduate
Philip J. Brookes, Ph.D. Degree Program

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I. Introduction

One of the teaching instruments used with students attending the Armor Officer Basic Course at Fort Knox, Kentucky, is the tactical decision exercise. The props for this exercise include a sandtable terrain board and miniature armored vehicles. The exercise is controlled by a captain who describes tactical situations that require the lieutenant to take actions and deliver orders.

The purpose of the exercise is threefold. First the tactical problem allows the lieutenant to demonstrate his ability to use the military decision making process. Second, by issuing orders and describing actions the platoon would take, he must understand the capabilities and limitations of the platoon. Finally, the controller questions the lieutenant about how his unit's actions relate to those forces on his left and right, and how the results of his actions create options for future missions. This exercise is one of the most basic used to develop tactical battlefield awareness in armor leaders. The question arises what does this have to do with operational art?

James J. Schneider provides the answer to this question in his article "The Loose Marble -- and the Origins of Operational Art." In this paper Schneider traces the development of operational art from the late eighteenth century through the American Civil War. Schneider suggests that for operational art to exist several characteristics

are required. His list includes the following: field armies, army groups, distributed logistics, distributed campaigns, distributed operations, strategic cavalry, deep strike, joint operations, distributed maneuver, continuous front, distributed battlefield and operational vision.

This monograph will concentrate on operational vision. Vision is the key element of operational art. It is vision which translates strategic aims into militarily achievable campaign objectives. This vision then acts like glue to bond individual tactical events into a single campaign. The vision that the commander develops provides the control which determines how the battlefield is organized and when events occur. The goal of vision is to sequence and cluster tactical events in such a way as to achieve operational objectives, and ultimately the strategic aims. Without vision there is no operational art.

According to Schneider operational vision is a product of a commander's historic imagination. This imagination allows the commander to see the entire battlefield through a mental picture. With this picture he understands how the actions in one theater of war influence other theaters of war. This vision lets the operational commander employ army groups in distributed campaigns on continuous fronts. Thus the commander is able to focus on a common goal allowing the employment of strategic cavalry or deep strikes in a mutually supporting manner. Operational vision is a way for the commander to see the desired

outcome and then direct all actions to that end state. It guides the sequencing of operations based on their relative value and interdependence. Without a clear vision operational art is no more than two blind boxers attempting to find each other in the ring. When they finally make contact they maintain that contact in a blind attempt to bludgeon each other into submission. There is no boxing, no art. The spectator observes only the mechanics of physical contact.

Classical theory makes the commander the centerpiece of operational vision. Sun Tzu, Clausewitz and Jomini spend a great deal of time explaining the character of the commander. This character will be analyzed in detail in order to determine the duties and responsibilities of the commander in regards to the development and use of operational vision.

The Army has also devoted a great deal of thought to the commander and vision. FM 22-103, Leadership and Command at Senior Levels, discusses how the commander develops and employs vision. The development of this doctrine must be understood in order to assess the effectiveness of the use of vision by operational commanders. Lieutenant Generals Cortney H. Hodges and George S. Patton will provide a mechanism to compare theory and doctrine to the actions of two different operational commanders.

There are many pieces to operational art. No matter how automated war becomes it remains a function of man. It is the decisions of the commander that bring success and failure. At the operational level it is the commander's vision that solidifies the pieces of operational art into a single force.

Vision is currently a popular business term. In the business sense vision is about greatness. It is normally a company's expression of its values and what the company hopes to contribute to society. It goes beyond the mission of the business. A vision is a working dream, a consciously created ideal organization. It is this ideal that each employee strives to achieve.[1] Military vision fits part of this business idea. Operational vision is more than a unit's mission, yet it is not an ideal that the organization pursues. It is more accurately described as a tool of the commander, or a skill that he develops and uses to visualize how tactical battles and engagements fit together. It is their combined affect that produces results and options for future action.

Military operational vision may best be described through a chess match. The players in a chess match never

[1]James J. Mapes, "Foresight First," Sky Magazine 20 (September 1991): 96-7.

think of just the next move. They mentally play the game seven, eight or more moves in the future. Every move they make is considered in terms of the opponent's reaction and the options it creates. All this is done while maintaining focus on the objective, checkmate. This type of future thinking which identifies results and options best demonstrates military operational vision. This basic understanding provides a start point for the analysis of operational vision in theory, doctrine and history.

II. Analysis

The military function of command has always been the subject of analysis. Thucydides in the History of the Peloponnesian War regularly explains the actions of commanders and how their actions affected the battlefield. Caesar's The Conquest of Gaul is almost exclusively a study of command with emphasis on how his actions as the commander affected his and the enemy armies. Although these discussions differ in format and emphasis there does exist commonality between them. Both classical and modern theorists usually examine commanders or commandship in terms of characteristics, skills or knowledge, and duties and responsibilities.

Sun Tzu outlines the qualities of a general. His general must be wise in order to recognize and react to circumstances, humane to appreciate others, courageous to avoid hesitation and strict to maintain discipline.[2]

[2]Sun Tzu, The Art of War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 65. Hereafter referred to as Sun Tzu.

This list has been supported by many of the military writers that followed Sun Tzu. Clausewitz also stressed that military genius required courage. Like Sun Tzu this courage was more than the facing of personal danger. To Clausewitz courage included the unwavering ability to accept responsibility,[3] to make decisions and stand by them no matter the circumstances.

Jomini, who made his observations on war at the same time as Clausewitz, used the term moral courage to explain this requirement of the commander. He believed that the combination of moral and physical courage was primary to all other skills. Moral courage stemmed from a thorough knowledge of the principles of the art of war.[4] Without this courage the commander could not provide the direction necessary to drive the force to an objective.

This same moral courage is discussed by Simpkin. He believes the operational commander requires moral courage to maintain his judgement so that short term losses can be accepted when they lead to the achievement of long term

[3]Carl von Clausewitz, On War (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) 101. Hereafter referred to as Clausewitz.

[4]Antoine Henri Jomini, The Art of War in Roots of Strategy, Book 2 (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1987) 455. Hereafter referred to as Jomini.

aims. Another part of this moral courage is to make decisions rapidly and remain convicted to those decisions.[5] Like Sun Tzu, Clausewitz and Jomini this twentieth century definition of courage focuses on the commander's ability to remain constant providing guidance and direction. This keeps the organization striving toward the objective even when information is limited or conflicting.

The ability of the commander to focus his unit's efforts on a single mission is a function of his strength of will. This will is made up of several parts: energy, firmness, staunchness, and emotional balance. The commander achieves true strength by maintaining balance and focus as his unit confronts the realities of the battlefield. The commander must overcome the powerful feeling and emotions generated by the death of comrades, defeats and victories.[6] A measure of this strength of will is a commander's farsightedness. Slim demonstrated this quality in Burma where he saw the need for a tactical defense to set the conditions for a successful invasion by

[5]Richard E. Simpkin, Race to the Swift, (Washington: Brassey's Defense Publishers, 1985) 217. Hereafter referred to as Simpkin.

[6]Clausewitz, 104-107.

British forces.[7]

Imagination is another characteristic of the mind that assists the commander in developing operational vision. This imagination should be rooted in an inquiring and controlled mind which is supported by a broad base of experience. Control of this imagination is critical so that the commander does not see doom in every operation or report. It is this very control by the commander that allows him to function during situations where information is uncertain or vague. By determining what can happen before the operation begins the commander can reduce uncertainty by using the events he imagined as possible to fill information voids. When the commander uses his controlled intellect to execute an operation based on information he assesses as true he is acting on facts. This allows the commander to make bold accurate decisions. It is this type of action that achieves decisive results.[8]

In addition to uncontrolled actions there are other dangerous qualities a commander should avoid. Hesitancy may allow an opportunity to pass, just as impulsiveness may

[7]William J. Slim, Defeat Into Victory (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1956), 285-288. Hereafter referred to as Slim.

[8]Slim, 413 and Clausewitz, 112 & 192.

force action when none is demanded. Compassion may also cloud the vision of a commander. If the losses of the battle climb too high the operational commander may lose focus causing the unit to waver.[9]

The operational commander will have many characteristics, but three are key to the development of useful vision. He must display moral courage. If he is unwilling or unable to accept the responsibility for stating a vision the unit will hesitate and delay, especially in the face of the unexpected. The commander must be disciplined to remain focused upon mission accomplishment. If he is distracted by unrelated success or short term failure the final objective will not be achieved. Finally, the commander must have a controlled mind. This will allow him to function with uncertainty and to visualize future action in a realistic manner. Together these criteria develop and guide the execution of the commander's vision.

The commander who possesses these characteristics is partially to the point where operational vision can be useful. He must also have certain tools that he can apply to a specific situation. One way of thinking of these tools is to know the enemy, yourself, the ground and the

[9]Sun Tzu, 114-115.

weather, which pave the way for the achievement of victory.[10]

Knowing the ground is made up of two parts. The first part is an understanding of distances. This includes not only how far it is between two points but also what type and size force can be employed on a specific piece of ground. The second part of knowing the ground is an appreciation of time. This too is more complex than knowing the hours in the day. The commander must understand how changes in ground will effect the movement of a force.[11] Understanding the relationship between time and distance allows the commander to accurately visualize how subordinate units will fight or arrive at a battle. This understanding, gained through experience, lets a commander determine what is achievable and what is not.

Another tool needed to understanding what can and cannot be done is knowledge about battle at the point of the sword. The operational commander must understand the dangers faced at the lowest tactical level. These dangers can stop the achievement of objectives when they outweigh the advantages of success. By understanding what dangers a

[10]Sun Tzu, 129.

[11]Sun Tzu, 64 and Clausewitz, 109.

unit will accept the commander can also identify what advantages he can use.[12] If the operational commander identifies an opportunity that has the potential to be decisive he must understand how it will be achieved at the tactical level. If the tactical risks make the execution of the operation unacceptable then there is no operational opportunity to exploit.

Knowing the enemy and your own force helps the commander determine what is within the realm of possibility. The commander must understand that not all reports in war are factual. All contact is heavy contact and every target is destroyed. This is compounded when one report confirms another only to find that they are both incorrect. By demanding that original plans be proven wrong and that both bad and good news be looked at skeptically the commander provides stability and constant direction. Understanding what is possible helps the commander to recognize right and wrong and then to act properly.[13]

Doubt is always the enemy of the operational commander. Because of his distance from the tactical fight where battles are won doubt will always surface.

[12]Sun Tzu, 73 and Clausewitz, 101.

[13]Clausewitz, 117 & 118.

Commanders at this level must truly be generals. In addition to understanding the capabilities and limitations of his basic branch he must also know the capabilities and limitations of all the forces in his command. This skill again allows the commander to understand what is possible. In practice, if the commander has a shortfall in this area it can be made up by the staff.[14]

This expertise in war fighting, either in the commander alone or including the staff, allows the use of intuition. Intuition demands the commander use several of the characteristics and skills discussed. To use it the commander must rapidly determine the truth, focus on the objective, then make accurate decisions based upon his knowledge of the enemy, terrain, his force and the vision he stated.

All these skills and knowledge are useless if the commander has no mental organization. The commander's brain must be organized like the fastest computer. His mental organization must allow the rapid access of information and synthesis of data so that time and opportunity are not lost. When the commander is not an expert in war fighting : must depend on time consuming detailed staff work he cannot quickly visualize the battle. As long as the staff recognizes all possible options in advance then the initiative will be maintained until the unexpected is encountered.

[14]Jomini, 456 & 457.

The primary duty or responsibility of the commander is to keep his head when all those around him are losing theirs. By demonstrating this at turbulent times the commander can bring order out of chaos. This is most important at times of uncertainty when it is up to the commander to make rapid, accurate decisions.[15] If the commander shirks this responsibility the unit will waver or hesitate in the face of danger. This creates a situation where the advantage can be lost and operations fail.

In order to conduct decision making rapidly and accurately the commander must appraise the situation correctly. This appraisal or estimate of the situation should be done in advance so that decisions are anticipated. This evaluation should be made in terms of the enemy and friendly capabilities and limitations, along with the terrain, objective and future operations. In short, every situation must be evaluated within the operational vision established by the commander. When correctly done the enemy can be conquered easily because the operational commander created the appropriate conditions for tactical success.[16]

[15] Clausewitz, 103 - 106.

[16] Sun Tzu, 63 & 87.

This estimate before battle not only helps set the conditions for success, it also provides a base the commander can use for extrapolation. It has already been said that war is made up of certainty and that the commander must identify the truth. Once this truth is determined it is the commander who is responsible to apply this truth to the battle. He must measure it against what is possible and what his appraisal deemed could be expected. In this way an accurate situation can be developed which identifies opportunities and options.[17] If this function is relegated to the staff then the commander abdicates his responsibility of command.

The basis of this extrapolation is experience. This experience can be in the form of combat, training or study. The commander must organize these experiences to allow rapid recall of general principles. This allows the commander to use knowledge gained from many sources to apply to a specific situation or problem. This expert commander with a broad experience does not require a powerful intellect. It demands the discipline and motivation to continue to study the art of war.[18] The

[17]Clausewitz, 101.

[18]Jose A Picart, "Expert Warfighters With Battlefield Vision," Military Review LXXI No. 5 (May 1991): 54 & 55.

leader with the attitude who believes there is always something to learn can excel.

This appraisal and extrapolation demand that the commander define the problem. An estimate or solution without a problem creates unnecessary turbulence. This turbulence causes the unit to veer away from the objective and may cause a change so drastic that subordinate units move beyond the bounds of the established operational vision. It is up to the commander to correctly identify the situation using his experience and knowledge. When time is available the staff can provide assistance by supplying facts, but it is the commander who begins to develop the solution by accurately identifying the problem.

The commander must define the problem because it is his job to control change in the unit. Throughout this process the commander must focus on the objective, and attempt to develop options that remain within his vision of the operation. By doing this he can allow the subordinate commanders a loose rein to achieve their assigned missions. By defining problems with a future focus the aim of the unit remains unchanged allowing the basic plan to remain valid.[19]

[19]Ardant du Picq, Battle Studies in Roots of Strategy, Book 2 (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1987), 236-7.

The operational commander must establish his vision so that tactical headquarters understand their mission. This is done through boundaries, objectives and resources. Details should be left to these subordinate headquarters because battles and engagements are won with tactics.[20] This method frees the operational commander to attack his operational counterpart. The objective of this attack is the operational vision of the opposing commander. When the enemy commander sees a mental picture of defeat, that is his vision is destroyed and no options exist, then the force is defeated.[21] Since the operational commander rarely sees all the effects of the battlefield his defeat must be visualized. Without this there can be no victory.

This may well have been the case in Grant's victory at Vicksburg. Pemberton, the confederate commander, was often confused by the actions of Grants's army. The attempts to reach Vicksburg from the north in conjunction with planned deceptions focused Pemberton on a threat from that direction. Once Grant defeated Pemberton at Champion's Hill Pemberton's vision of the operation was destroyed. In

[20]Martin van Creveld, Command In War (Cambridge MA: Oxford University Press, 1985), 200 - 201. Hereafter referred to as Creveld, Command In War.

[21]Simpkin, Race to the Swift, 224-5.

this way his moral courage was shaken to the point of defeat.

Theoretically there are characteristics, skills and duties a commander must have and use to develop, employ and maintain operational vision. He must possess the moral courage to make life and death decisions that effect subordinates at all levels. Required is the skill to focus on the future to insure objectives linked to higher aims are achieved. An understanding of time, space and capabilities is mandatory so that only the realm of the possible is assigned. Finally he must recognize that it is his duty to make the decisions of the command based on what he determines as true and accurate information. These are the tools that help commanders develop vision.

When every theory is reviewed from a current perspective the question arises how has the application of technology effected the theoretical principles? Since the time of Clausewitz and Jomini many innovations have been added to the battlefield which enhance the function of command. From telegraph to radio to satellite communications the information available to the commander has expanded and become more rapidly available. Even so, the function of command remains in the human domain. Artificial intelligence does not command. Technology changed how individuals command and that must be analyzed as it applies to operational vision.

Technological advantages are fleeting. Major technical inequalities only occur when there is a total culture shock. An example of this might be the first meeting between the Spanish Conquistadores and the Aztecs in Mexico. When a less advanced population survives the first engagement they usually make up the technology difference quickly. The Plains Indians are an example of this rapid modernization.[22] They quickly adopted the rifle once the futility of the bow and arrow was identified. Although this adaptation did not achieve a campaign victory, the Indians did win a decisive battle at Little Big Horn.

Over time all things reach an equilibrium. Armies begin to reflect each other in terms of equipment, organization and training.[23] This does not dismiss technology, but it recognizes that the effect is quickly equalized. The differences that do exist which give an advantage are those that man can easily use. These are the advantages that increase proficiency and battlefield performance. As long as man remains the center piece of war, technology will not change the basic principles.

Man's duty is to understand how technology improves

[22]Chris Bellamy, The Evolution of Modern Land Warfare (London: Routledge, 1990) 34.

[23]Clausewitz, 195.

capabilities and to make maximum use of the advantages technology provides. Its limitations must also be understood or technology becomes a false hope.[24] Military artists must apply technology by knowing what it can and can not provide. Just as the commander must know what is in the realm of possible when employing units, he must also know what technology can and can not improve in battle.

Radio is a good example of how technology did not change the ideas of theory, but provided advantages to the commander who employed it properly. Radio freed the commander from fixed point wire communication nets. It returned the commander to the battlefield. Regardless of the speed of operations, weather, time of day or terrain the commander could stay in touch with both fighter and control nodes. This allowed him to go to that point on the battlefield where his presence could influence the action.[25] This is like Sharra's description of Lee in The Killer Angles. During Pickett's charge Lee placed himself where Pickett's troops would fall back so that if they failed he could stem their retreat.

The future may see greater collocation of the

[24]van Creveld, Command In War, 231.

[25]van Creveld, Command In War, 192-3.

commanders who control maneuver, fires, air and logistics. This would allow an immediate, face to face exchange of information. Details not readily available would be supplied by staffs within radio contact. A similar option to collocation could be battlefield teleconference. This would allow the operational commander to provide his presence over a widely dispersed area.[26] This would not change the requirement for the commander to develop and explain his vision of the operation so that subordinates can execute their missions.

Technology that allows the commander to see and feel the battle over widely dispersed units will improve their ability to provide order from chaos. It does not replace command judgement or the responsibility of determining accuracy. It merely provides more information for that determination. As the tactical battles become more dispersed operational commanders will require tools like teleconferencing so they will be able to gain a feel for the operation, and evaluate its success in terms of the operational vision established.

The commander made from theoretical ideas would possess morale courage, discipline, wisdom and a steadiness of

[26]Chris Bellamy, The Future of Land Warfare (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987) 268 - 271.

action. He would understand and apply technological innovation to the advantage of his force. He would also understand time and distance thereby knowing how long it takes to move units into battle. He would employ units to maximize their capabilities and minimize their limitations. Most importantly he would recognize and execute his duty to decide. His decisions would be based on information that he deems to be accurate and factual so that his decisions are timely and correct. These are the ideas of theory that the doctrine of command should reflect.

As doctrine bridges theory enroute to practice, it serves to translate theoretical ideas into doctrinal principles. These principles are then used to create tactics, techniques and procedures that are practiced by unit commanders. That gray area, tactics, techniques and procedures, are more adaptable to technical applications which effect doctrine. This is the area where change is reflected in technological innovations. Command has always been a human function and so the principles of command stated in doctrine generally remain unaffected by new tools. Still, command has evolved over time to a point today where intent, vision, mission and communications are common concepts and tools of command.

The basis of these concepts can be found in the 1941 version of FM 100-5, Operations. This manual, like classical theory, stressed that the commander must have a strong feeling of responsibility, remain resolute in his decisions and appear cool and thoughtful under pressure. It also stressed that the strength of the Army lies in individuals, and that the commander was responsible to insure that these individuals were molded into cohesive units. The commander was then charged with directing these units toward mission accomplishment through orders, guidance and supervision.

This 1940's commander who accepted responsibility, displayed decisive conduct, protected combat power and recognized good service was also instructed to focus on future missions. In his estimate process the commander is directed to evaluate options based upon the mission, means available, the enemy and conditions of the area. It further recommends that if two options appear to achieve the same results then the one that is best able to carry out future action should be chosen.[27] This reference to future operations implies that accomplishment of this mission and establishing favorable conditions for the next

[27]U.S. Army, FM 100-5, Field Service Regulation -- Operations (Washington: War Department, 1941), 25 & 26.

are the focus of the commander. These should drive his vision of the current battle.

Current doctrine, represented by the 1986 version of FM 100-5, follows the same course as the earlier version. It makes leadership the most essential element of combat power. The leader at all levels provides purpose, direction and motivation while balancing the elements of combat power. To be effective the leader must be skilled in the art of war and possess a strong character. This character should be made up of courage, conviction and discipline.

Specifically at the operational level leaders must understand that all things occur more slowly. Lead times are longer and forces are slow to move. These facts drive the requirement for mission orders, anticipation and initiative.[28] The driving force for anticipation and initiative at the subordinate level is a clearly developed and stated vision. This vision is a combination of intent that explains why a mission must be accomplished and what that accomplishment will gain for the force. Simply put vision provides a common understanding that allows cooperation toward a common goal.

[28]U.S. Army, FM 100-5 Operations (Washington: Department of the Army, 1986), 22.

The senior army leadership manual, FM 22-103 is aimed directly toward the commander at the operational level of war. It explains that this commander by sheer size of unit is forced to use indirect organizational leadership. That is, he must build functional suborganizations through subordinates that contribute to the larger whole. It does stress the responsibility of the operational commander to rapidly assess the situation, tolerate uncertainty, understand the workings of his force and continue to learn the art of war. It softens its war fighting perspective in its discussion of vision. Vision is explained as a personal concept of the leader. It describes what an organization will be capable of doing at some future time.[29] This definition places no time limit on achieving results nor does it include parameters like mission accomplishment as inputs. It imitates the business world where a company's vision is an ideal strived for daily but may never be attainable.

Emerging doctrine presented in several pamphlets improve the war fighting focus hinted at in FM 22-103. Operational command is explained as the exercise of authority and direction over assigned forces. It is

[29]U.S. Army, FM 22-103 Leadership and Command at Senior Levels (Washington: Department of the Army, 1987), 7-9.

accomplished through the arrangement of personnel, equipment, facilities and procedures in time and space. This commander assigns tasks, maintains the aim, imposes restrictions and allocates resources.[30] These requirements demand that the operational commander maintain a focus beyond the next tactical objective. Tactical commanders will fight the battles that contribute to operational success. The operational commander must focus on the establishment of conditions that allow tactical success not only in this engagement but in those that are subsequent. This will achieve the operational objective. In addition to setting the conditions for tactical success the operational commander decides when requisite conditions are achieved to initiate battle. It is his initiative that directs decisive maneuver. Once this maneuver is started the operational commander makes small adjustments providing maximum flexibility to subordinates.[31]

Current and emerging doctrine demand a command system at the operational level that is different from that found at the tactical level. Not unlike the former Soviet Army, our requirements stress control over command at brigade and

[30]U.S. Army, TRADOC Pam 11-9, Blueprint of the Battlefield (Ft Monroe, VA: Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1990), 13 & 14.

[31]U.S. Army, TRADOC Pam 525-5, Airland Operations (Ft Monroe, VA: Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1991), 21 & 30.

below. Control mechanisms such as formations can be found in doctrinal manuals from platoon up to brigade. During Desert Storm divisions used formations like column and line to control subordinate brigades. At the operational level the command system requires less emphasis on control.

The operational command system should resemble a guided missile. The operational commander programs the force through his vision, assignment of objectives and allocation of resources. On the operational commander's order the missile is fired. This commander then observes the flight of his force. If the programming, that is vision, is correct then the operational commander makes no corrections. If external forces effect the flight, the operational commander makes minimal corrections to maintain the aim of the missile.

This optional control method provides maximum independence for subordinates while allowing superiors the freedom to focus on total organization mission accomplishment. This puts the commander with the most information in a position to make decisions in accordance with the higher commander's vision. It does not deny the higher commander from entering the net to keep subordinates on track.[32]

[32]van Creveld, Command In War, 194-5 & 228-9.

This type of command system requires an operational commander with the ability to develop and provide a clear vision. This commander must be willing to decide what that vision is and to tolerate uncertainty during the execution of that vision. He must also state what information he must have so that subordinates report what is required, not every action. The operational commander must exploit technology to increase his feel for the battle. He must supervise subordinates without interfering while simultaneously staying in touch with the entire operation. An operational commander who remains in his command post awaiting reports will feel a great deal of stress using this system.

When past, current and emerging doctrine are compared to the theory of command there is a good match. Doctrine demands that the commander conduct his own estimate of the situation. This process will fulfill the requirement in theory that forces the commander to assess what is true and then make decisions based upon that truth. It also is a method to retain a focus on the future if the estimate done by the commander strives to keep the force in a position to continue operations. Current doctrine emphasizes the need for a commander to possess a strong character. Like theory the doctrine uses courage, conviction and discipline to explain this character. Current and emerging doctrine both stress the speed of operations and how each level of war

has a unique tempo of operations. Operationally the commander must understand that anticipation is key since units are slow to change direction or mission. If there is a hole in doctrine it is its lack of discussion of control procedures at the operational level. Control of units at the operational level is really left to the commander assigned. He must develop the principles and procedures to control forces based on his preference and experience.

The true measure of a theoretical idea or doctrinal principle is its application during war. There are many operational commanders who have displayed moral courage, objective focus, a knowledge of the enemy and the ground, and remained calm during the chaos of battle. During World War II, two army commanders applied these ideas and principles under almost the same conditions at precisely the same time. When Twelfth Army Group was activated General Bradley turned over command of First Army to his deputy General Hodges. Simultaneously, General Patton activated the Third Army. These two armies spent the rest of the war side by side. The conditions, enemy and directing headquarters these commanders dealt with were almost identical. Both armies were successful and their unique location allows a somewhat controlled review of how these commanders operated.

One of the most obvious differences between Hodges and Patton was their style of command. Patton's outbursts are well chronicled and are a sharp contrast to Hodges. Hodges' command style reflected his mentor, General Omar Bradley. He ran his command calmly and efficiently like a corporation. His command post was the center of this operation. War to Hodges was logical, dispassionate and utterly ruthless.[33] The difference in execution between Hodges and Bradley was the the former lacked Bradley's intelligence, communication skills and energy.[34] Hodges' corporate office command method reduced his effectiveness. Since orders and directives did not include paragraphs that explained commander's intent or vision then the understanding of this came from seniors and subordinates discussing operations as they unfolded.[35] Hodges lacked the skills and attitude to do this.

Patton, on the other hand made maximum use of technology to be with commanders at the front and remain in touch with his staff. Patton organized a mobile fast

[33]John Toland, Battle: the Story of the Bulge (New York: New American Library, 1959), 56. Hereafter referred to as Toland.

[34]Daniel P. Bolger, "Zero Defects: Command Climate in First Army, 1944-45," Military Review LXXI (May 1991): 69.

[35]This is based on a synthesis of 1940s doctrine as explained in FM 101-5, dated 1940, and a review of directives and letters issued by First and Third Armies during October through December 1944.

moving command headquarters that was designed to function in fluid situations. This headquarters could provide accurate information to support his command decisions anywhere on the battlefield.[36] Patton made extensive use of this headquarters during the Ardennes campaign to be at the critical point of the battle.

When the Eleventh Armored Division hit Manteuffel's attempt to cut the line of communications to Bastogne on January 1 both units stalled. Patton learned this from his mobile headquarters and rushed to the Eleventh Armored command post. There he met Major General Middleton, the Corps commander. Patton and Middleton learned that the Eleventh Armored Division lost forty-nine medium and fifteen light tanks in the action on the previous day. The commander of the Eleventh wanted to use January 2 to reorganize. Patton directed the attack be continued immediately, and by eleven o'clock that night the Eleventh Armored Division seized its objective of St. Etienne. His actions got the attack moving again, and focused the Eleventh Armored Division on mission accomplishment.[37]

When a commander appraises a situation it is important

[36]Oscar W Koch, G2: Intelligence for Patton (Philadelphia, PA: Whitmore Publishing, 1971), 26. Hereafter referred to as Koch.

[37]Headquarters VIII Corps, "After Action Report for 1 - 31 January 1945", dated 25 April 1945, 87 - 88.

that he knows the details of his unit. If a commander uses his staff in this estimate he must also know the capabilities and limitations of each staff officer. Hodges' Chief of Staff, General Kean, and Operations Officer, General Thorson, had little faith in Colonel Dickson, the Intelligence Officer. They believed him to be a typical intelligence pessimist who builds up enemy capabilities beyond reality. For this reason when Colonel Dickson accurately identified the German capability to counterattack in the Ardennes this estimate was not highly considered.[38] This skepticism does not reflect Colonel Dickson's record. In August he accurately predicted the general collapse of the German forces after Operation Cobra. He was also one of the few officers retained by Patton after he took over Second Corps after Kasserine.[39]

Patton provided his staff more freedom. When he issued a directive he seldom interfered with the way the staff carried it out. This increased his freedom to visit forward units and commanders. In accordance with the doctrine of the time, Patton conducted his own estimates.

[38]Russell F. Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974), 459 - 460. Hereafter referred to as Weigley.

[39]John S.D. Eisenhower, The Bitter Woods (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 50 & Koch, 15.

He normally asked the staff officers direct questions about details he required. He expected direct answers in return. During a conference between Bradley and Patton concerning the situation in Bastogne Patton call Colonel Koch, the G2, in and asked, "Should Bastogne be held?" Koch responded that it should and provided a short explanation why. Bradley nodded to Patton and Koch was dismissed.[40] This is typical of how the staff provided required details to Patton.

Early in the planning process Patton included broad statements of essential elements of information that his staff would refine. Often these were no more than how he thought the unit would fight. While the Third Army was still in England Patton described how he thought the battle on the continent would unfold. He focused the G2 planner on Metz stating that the Third Army would start operations at about Nantes on the Atlantic coast and attack east along the Loire River. The Army would not cross the river unless forced to do so by enemy action.[41] These broad statements might be as close to a formal intent or statement of vision that was achieved in World War II operations.

[40]Koch, 106.

[41]Koch, 53.

Even if there is no formal statement of operational vision, a commander who has created a vision of the operation will be prepared to issue orders when the operation dictates. He will be able to make those adjustments to keep the unit on track. During the month of November 1944 Hodges' army identified five additional divisions added by the enemy to the battle. Also identified was the Twelfth SS Panzer Corps functioning as a mobile reserve. These forces were positioned near the Ardennes where the First Army assumed risk to allow attacks toward the Roer River in the north. Hodges and his staff made no operational changes to counter this recognized threat.[42]

This may have occurred because of a strong mission focus on the part of General Hodges. The First Army pushed very hard in late November and early December 1944 to secure the Roer River dams and a bridgehead on that river. During a nine day period seven hundred and seventy three bombing missions were directed by the First Army to this end.[43] Even when the forces identified as capable of launching a counteroffensive began attacking, General

[42]First United States Army, "After Action Report, November - December 1944," 44, 49, 54-55, 64-65. Hereafter referred to as FUSA AAF

[43]FUSA AAR, 66.

Hodges denied a request by the Fifth Corps commander to halt an attack north of the Ardennes that was threatened by the German action. Because of conflicting reports, Hodges believed the German advance to be only a spoiling attack.[44] This lack of vision by Hodges pushed the Fifth Corps further away from where it was needed to blunt or control the German penetration.

When Patton was informed of the same enemy build up identified by the First Army in the Ardennes, he directed tactical reconnaissance plans be expanded to include that region.[45] This change in reconnaissance was initiated because intelligence estimates were that this force could effect the Third Army's offensive into the Saar within twenty-four hours.

Patton's vision was not restricted to his own army, but included his higher headquarters. He also recognized the threat this build up of enemy armor meant to the Twelfth Army Group. On December 9, 1944, Patton directed his staff to begin planning to change the Third Army's direction of attack to a more northerly direction. This was contingent upon the actions under taken by the German reserve forces.

[44] Toland, 39.

[45] Third United States Army, "After Action Report, August 1944 - May 1945, Volume II, Staff Reports", 23 - 27.

Because of this staff work, including terrain analysis, movement plans and command and control arrangements plans were ready when Bradley issued orders to redirect the Third Army to relieve Bastogne.[46]

One common characteristic of Hodges and Patton was that they were both willing to make the difficult decisions of command. As the Battle of the Bulge unfolded Hodges received several units as reinforcements. Normally he assigned each division a specific mission. When the Thirtieth Infantry Division was given to First Army Hodges directed it be place under Fifth Corps' control and employed on the Corps' right flank. This assignment of missions two levels down was in accordance with doctrine, but it limited the command initiative of subordinates. General Gerow, the Fifth Corps commander, was forced to redirect the Thirtieth Division based upon the enemy situation.[47] Hodges' micromanagement increased the uncertainty experienced by subordinate units. This could have been avoided if Hodges would have stated what must be done and then resourced his corps to achieve the visualized end state. In short, he lacked a vision of the battle.

Patton can also be accused of micromanagement. His

[46]Koch, 86 and TUSA AAR Volume II, 26.

[47]Weigley, 493-4.

continuous presence at the front often put him in a position to make tactical decisions. Often these decisions were more accurately approvals of subordinates actions. Major General Gaffey, Commander of the Fourth Armored Division, requested Patton's approval to assume a big risk. When about six miles from Bastonge and his Combat Command R was down to about twenty tanks he proposed an attack directly to the city. It was questionable if the attack would ultimately provide the relief, but Patton approved the action.[48] This decision by Patton was within his vision to relieve Bastonge, and the risk accepted may have been the operational commander's to approve.

Both Hodges and Patton displayed the necessary skills to command an army. Both ultimately were successful. If there was any advantage it went to Patton who handled rapidly changing situations extremely well. As the Allies pursued the Germans across France and after the Bulge into Germany, both Armies excelled. When faced with the unexpected in the Ardennes, Patton's methods proved more effective. He exploited radio communications to keep him at the point of the sword while maintaining contact with his staff. He also more accurately identified the possibilities open to the Germans and initiated planning to counter those options. This was a function of Patton's vision of the battle.

[48] Toland, 281-283.

Hodges, on the other hand, displayed a strong singleness of purpose which restricted his vision of the battlefield. The First Army actions to seize the Roer River dams clouded his ability to identify other options open to the Germans. He believed that the enemy was beaten and could not mount an offensive. He maintained this attitude even after his G2 clearly stated this offensive capability of the enemy. Ultimately, Patton believed what he saw, and Hodges believed what he wanted.

III. Conclusions

Many obvious conclusions can be drawn from the analysis. Operational vision as described in theory and doctrine is useful. Operational vision, when clearly communicated, provides guidance and bounds to subordinate commanders. These conclusions are valid, but there are other less obvious conclusions that are very important to future doctrine, training and leader development.

The May 1941 version of FM 100-5, Operations, makes the commander's estimate of the situation the key part of operational decision making. This manual states that the commander's estimate is an independent process, and that this process drives the staff estimates. Current doctrine blurs this primary role of the commander by stating that operational commanders and their staff officers use the estimate of the situation and planning process described in

FM 101-5.[49] This reference implies that the commander and the staff work as an integral team to develop plans and make decisions. The staff and commander do work as a team but only the commander makes decisions.

Emerging doctrine should reflect the procedure as described in the 1941 version of FM 100-5. The commander makes an independent estimate of the situation using the staff to supply required details. The commander's estimate drives the estimates of the staff. The staff monitors the execution of the plan, keeping abreast of the situation and supplying information the commander requires for decision making. The commander is the lead character and the staff plays a supporting role. Patton used this system effectively throughout World War II.

Whether this doctrinal principle is incorporated in the Army's manual for operations or not, it remains in the manual for staff operations. This manual details the estimate of the situation and the planning process which are taught in Army professional development courses. These courses build their tactical instruction around the commander's estimate process and make a critical error. A student is not assigned the role of commander. This position is normally played by an instructor who minimizes his interface with the student staff. This reinforces the

[49]FM 100-5, 1986, 28.

misconception that the staff drives the decision making process. To train as we will fight, a student must fulfill the role of commander, demanding details, providing guidance and most of all making decisions.

Current doctrine also fails to address the components of operational vision and how to record it in a campaign plan. Vision is more than the concept of intent at the tactical level. Like intent it should include a disciplined statement of the end state that achieves success, but more is necessary. The vision should explain the conditions that are required for tactical success to be achieved. These conditions would link the anticipated battles and engagements into a campaign. Vision should address how and under what conditions means are applied to a desired end.

The campaign plan presented in Joint Chiefs of Staff Publication 3-0 includes a statement of the strategic concept. This concept states the broad guidance for the deployment, employment and sustainment of major forces. It fails to address the end state. If the guidance on employment includes an explanation of necessary conditions for employment of forces and the final end state which achieves success is included, then doctrine will state a need for and a method to record vision.

Finally, the Army must review how senior officers are prepared for operational command. Leader development is

made up of three parts: self-study, operational assignments and schooling. Schools are improving with the inclusion of instruction at the operational level of war. Self-study is widely encouraged, but evaluation is difficult. The most useful tool in developing operational commanders is assignments. Patton's assignments prepared him for Army command. Unlike Hodges, who did not command at the division or corps level, Patton's wartime command of the Second Armored Division, First Armored Corps and the Second Corps provided an experience base he used as an Army commander.[50] This assignment pattern is a good model for operational commander development.

Operational vision is a product of the operational commander's estimate of the situation. This commander must have the moral courage to decide on a vision and then clearly communicate it to his subordinates. This vision should enhance flexibility by explaining the prerequisite conditions and outlining how to achieve desired ends. Once the vision is understood in a command the operational leader can then guide the unit to mission accomplishment.

[50]Robert H. Berlin, Dr. U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography (Ft. Leavenworth: CSI Publications, July 1989) 18-19.

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